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## Turned Away, but Running Back

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## Laura Woodman

Laura is a Mainer turned Ohioan and is an aspiring Historian with a focus on the Gilded Age in America. She enjoys a good iced latte, watching the New England Patriots dominate in football, and Simon & Garfunkel/ John Denver.

## Turned Away, but Running Back

I won \$500 in the spring of my fifth grade year, when I wrote an essay detailing what I wanted the rest of my life to look like, and how I was going to accomplish it- Cedarville University was my main goal. My mother had attended college there and I figured that it would be perfect to follow in her footsteps. Three days into my first semester here, however, I was standing on the edge of Cedar Lake, wondering what would be the quickest and least painful way to commit suicide. In retrospect, I can now see how selfish and honestly, how ridiculous I was. However, in the heat of the moment, it seemed perfectly rational to end my life. I never thought I would have to get to the point where I knew God was actively pursuing me, and trying to reteach me fundamental aspects of His nature and care for me. God in his great grace and mercy, however, drew me back to Himself and used my first semester for His glory.

My family had been a picture-perfect family until high school began, when my twin brother went off the deep end, denouncing God and beginning a life of drugs and alcohol. This caused my parents to stop working at the Christian camp I had lived at seasonally since I was a toddler, and to decrease their

involvement in the church, though I soldiered on. My town was never a religious one, so being the only professing Christian in my school combined with being the high-achieving nerd that everyone loved to hate, isolation was inevitable. What was supposed to be a time of celebration of accomplishments for graduation turned into a desperate flee of the school, and a time of turmoil for my family as they focused on Seth rather than me. I began to not want to go to Cedarville anymore, I felt I needed to be home and take care of family problems my parents were avoiding and ignoring. However, since I had just taken out loans, it was mid-summer, and I had not applied anywhere...there was no way I could escape Cedarville. I did try, however, try to wreck relationships with my bosses and parents more than I had ever before by bolting from work and being belligerent, all of which did not turn out in my favor. Since my relationship with my parents was already strained, and I was known as the child who actually would have a future, I did not reveal my want to not be at Cedarville until they had already driven me out 1,221 miles. Believe it or not, I was expecting some semblance of pity, but instead there was just anger and silence. Instead of my parents letting me come home, I was left here without even so much as goodbye hugs.

I thought God was taking away everyone and everything I knew, and I was hurting so much I could hardly breathe, let alone try and function. My first three weeks of college consisted of crying, avoiding meals and public places, and sleeping. It took the point of me losing fifteen pounds and failing multiple class assignments for me to not only realize what I was doing. However, my heart was still rebellious and I kept on, even though I knew I

was sinning. Finally, my RD had to intervene, after going to counseling just escalated matters. She took my hands and she said, “Darlin, I don’t know why you’re here, but you are.” They were such simple words, and to the point, but they struck me, I had needed someone to remind me that I could not change my situation, and I needed to get beyond my pity party. I even knew that if I went back to praying and truly devoting time to devotions that God would use it, but I was not ready for that. God was, however, and He truly began pursuing me.

Verses that had not been in my mind for years were suddenly coming to me at random times, and I could not get them out of my head. They were ones that I had claimed in seasons of life that were fruitful such as Psalm 143:5-6: “I remember the days of old, I meditate on all that you have done; I ponder the work of your hands. I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land.” I did not want to remember what He had done, I just wanted to dwell on the misery. Not only that, but hymns I had once cherished constantly played through my head and I found myself humming them, which annoyed me greatly. Slowly the want to pray began to return, but at that point I did not know what I even should pray, or how to begin. I felt directed towards Romans 8:26b: “For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” I was embarrassed because really the only prayers I could think to form were “help” and “please forgive me”, but I knew that God knew every little thing and that the Spirit would take it to God on my behalf. Mid-September I cracked open my Bible for the first time to actually purposefully read it, instead

of just skimming for chapel or a class, the desire to do so was not there, but I knew that if I was active in pursuing God as He was pursuing me, I could not continue to be the same.

I firmly believe that God was withholding some blessings such as friends and a sense of belonging from me until I had begun to fully rely on Him and had turned back. I was quite alone the first few weeks while I struggled, and honestly it had shocked me that those visibly seeing my struggle had not reached out to me.

However, just three days after I had consecrated with God that I was going to pursue Him, a girl asked me to sit next to her in bible class, and we became best friends practically overnight. He has used her as my accountability partner and someone who has helped my walk so much. As well, my struggle to leave my room and even leave my bed started dissipating as I began to enjoy my early mornings, delving into the Word with a cup of coffee by my side. I re-learned so many aspects about God, and his steadfast and abounding love for me; it was all so elementary, but so needed. My personal favorite aspect of His I re-learned was the greatest comfort to me when I still had to deal with problems that were continuing back home, coming from Psalm 56:8, “You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?” Even though my parents would not let me talk about what I was going through and just fed me drama, I knew God was keeping track of my struggles and cared about my sleepless nights and pain. All He wanted in return was my trust, and devotion back.

The turnaround was fairly quick, by the end of September I had almost all but recovered of the moods I had been in since my arrival. I was able to begin raising my hands in worship again, and

sing praise songs earnestly and from the bottom of my heart. His love for me expanded my heart with so much love for others that I hardly knew what to do with it all. It was amusing to sit down and have dinner with my RA who claimed she “was not sure who she was even having dinner with.” Life was not all sunshine and roses, obviously, as there was still difficult situations occurring back home that I had to deal with and even some small problems here. However, with the trust I had placed in the Lord, I had peace, and newfound strength and maturity to face the problems with Him and in Him. It was a very low point that I had to get to, to know that the Lord was chasing me to reconcile, but I will never regret taking His hand.

## Work Cited

Student Study Bible, English Standard Version, Crossway, 2018